

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Retired nurses create four-parish health ministry

By Jennifer Ficaglia
Assistant Editor

Felice Armignacco and Marie DeMarco of Webster have always believed that health care and spirituality go hand in hand.

"Our spiritual well being and our health are so interconnected that we can't separate them," DeMarco noted.

That's why their interests were piqued 20 years ago when they learned during a nursing convention that the Lutheran Church also embraced that belief. Since the mid-1980s, many Lutheran churches have had nurses on staff or established ministries that provide holistic health care to parishioners.

Both Armignacco and DeMarco found the concept intriguing, but neither had time to act on the idea because of their nursing jobs at the time. Armignacco was director of Monroe County Health Department's nursing division, and DeMarco was a community health nurse.

Armignacco, a parishioner at St. Rita Church in Webster, retired in 1991, and by that time the idea of health ministries was starting to catch on locally. By the late 1990s, a parish health-ministry network comprising various religious denominations had formed in Rochester. Armignacco attended one of its meetings as did DeMarco, a parishioner at St. Paul Church in Webster, who had retired in 1997. The two had talked over the years about forming a health ministry, and decided now was the time to do it.

"We decided we should really do something," Armignacco said.

They began recruiting other nurses who were members of four area parishes that had been linked by the diocesan pastoral planning process — St. Rita, St. Paul and



Karin von Volgtlander/Staff photographer

Felice Armignacco (center) and Marie DeMarco (right) show Draw Desmarais, director of religious education at St. Rita's Church in Webster, how they take a person's blood pressure Aug. 2 at the church office. Armignacco and DeMarco are cofounders of the Webster-Penfield Health Ministry.

Holy Trinity in Webster and Holy Spirit in Penfield. After receiving support from parish leaders and forming a steering committee comprising representatives from each church, the Webster-Penfield Health Ministry was born. Armignacco said the four parishes are the first Catholic churches in the Rochester Diocese to come together in an ongoing collaboration of this type.

The group's primary goals, Armignacco said, are to act as an initial contact when people need health-care assistance or have questions, to link people with appropriate health-care resources in the community

and to provide education to keep people well.

During the health ministry's first year, parishioners were asked to fill out questionnaires to assess their interest in various health topics. As a result, during its second year, the group offered educational programs and health screenings, including stress management, nutrition, wellness, fitness, dental hygiene and monthly blood-pressure checks. Along the way, other medical professionals were recruited as volunteers for the programs and health screenings.

"It's indeed a real health-ministry team,"

DeMarco said. "People have been called on (to volunteer) and have responded."

Now in its third year, the health ministry hosted Mercy Center with the Aging's "Caring for an Aging Loved One" seminar in April, and will conduct a program on hospice care Oct. 20. Group members also write monthly health-care items for the four church bulletins. By year's end, the group hopes to establish a telephone line for people who need assistance with health problems or issues.

A health ministry logically fits in with other ministries that the parishes offer, Armignacco said, since Jesus was concerned about our total humanity and understood that if our bodies and minds were not in harmony, we would not be able to focus on his word. The Webster-Penfield Health Ministry wants to help the whole person, she added, and hopes to unite body, mind and spirit so people can hear God's voice.

"(The health ministry) encompasses the physical and the spiritual very naturally," Armignacco said.

Armignacco and DeMarco said feedback regarding the health ministry has been positive.

"It's been a very gratifying experience," Armignacco said. "I look forward to expanding what we're doing."

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For more information on the Webster-Penfield Health Ministry, call Felice Armignacco at 585/671-5177 or Marie DeMarco at 585/671-6007.

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